

Part 16 – Patience

After seeing his father, older brother Jigme and sister Norzin, Chetsang Rinpoche wanted to visit the rest of his family in the United States. But in India he was a refugee, and to travel to the U.S. he needed to get some certificates from the Indian government, a long and difficult process. First, he was interviewed by Indian government officials who asked him many questions, especially about Tibetans and the political situation in Tibet. They wanted to know all the details about the strength of the Chinese army, about informers to the Chinese Communists, how he escaped Tibet, and how he got to India from Nepal without being noticed by the border officials. Rinpoche patiently answered all their questions. But he had to be careful. If he spoke about his long-haired traveling companion or the Tibetan government officials who helped him, they might get in trouble, so he simply told the truth without mentioning them - he said he hadn't been checked at the border crossing.



The interview took place in Delhi where Rinpoche was staying at the home of his aunt and her husband, Gelek Rinpoche, who was no longer living as a monk.

Chetsang Rinpoche remembered seeing Gelek Rinpoche's father being marched around and humiliated by the Red Guards around the Jokhang Palace in Lhasa. It all seemed like yesterday.

(photo of Chetsang Rinpoche with his father (left) and Gelek Rinpoche (far right))

Gelek Rinpoche now had a job with All India Radio and he knew many government officials, so he was of tremendous help to Chetsang Rinpoche to get his certificates so he could travel. The Indian government officials would have stacks of files sitting on their desks, and one by one the file at the top of the stack was worked on and then passed to the next official and placed at the bottom of his stack of documents. Each official worked through the stack of files from the top file to the bottom file, which could take many weeks before a file is passed on to the next official in the process. If someone wanted his file to be finished sooner, then it was common to pay an official a bribe. Gelek Rinpoche always seemed to find a way to keep Chetsang Rinpoche's files moving through the offices. He made phone calls, sometimes arranged a little gift for some officials, and sometimes pressured them. As soon as the file moved to the next office, Gelek Rinpoche found out where it was and called the director in charge of the office. Chetsang Rinpoche had to go to meetings with some officials, and this was a new experience.

No one ever showed up for work on time, and when they did appear, they had long conversations with friends in the office, and ordered tea. Then at noon they had a long lunch, and when they returned, they continue chatting, and then went home early at the end of the day. Gelek Rinpoche patiently tracked and pushed Chetsang Rinpoche's files for three months to keep the files moving on to the next office. Finally, after three months of waiting, Chetsang Rinpoche got his certificate.

The next step was to contact the American embassy. He dreaded having to go through yet another long process. But he only needed to swear the information in his certificate was true, and they handed him a sealed envelope he wasn't allowed to open until he landed in the U.S.

Then Chetsang Rinpoche and his father got on a flight to New Jersey. Flying on an airplane and going through the process at airports was a whole new experience for Rinpoche.

When they landed, they had to fill out confusing forms. Rinpoche handed over his thick file of papers to the immigration officials, and then he had to take a seat and wait. He looked around at all the strange and unfamiliar things around him in this new country, the U.S. There was an air-conditioner blowing out cool air, a vending machine full of all kinds of things to eat, and a color television with a baseball game going on but the sound turned off.

Suddenly a friendly-looking police officer appeared and handed Rinpoche a green card still warm from the printing machine. A green card! Permission to stay and live in the United States, not just to visit! How could that happen so fast? Rinpoche's father shook his head in disbelief. He had to wait three years to get his green card. Rinpoche accepted it with equanimity rather than amazement, because there were many times in his life that obstacles and problems suddenly melted away. (Photo: Namlha (right), Rinpoche and father (center))



They were picked up at the airport by his sister Namlha and her husband, the brother of the Dalai Lama, who drove to their house in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, a suburb of New York City.

Namlha could hardly believe that Rinpoche had escaped. It had been so unlikely that he would be able to escape that the family had given up hope. And now he was there, standing in front of her! A kind Mongolian lama, Geshe Wangyal, who lived

nearby came to visit, who had known Rinpoche's grandfather very well. He embraced Rinpoche warmly and pressed a hundred-dollar bill into his hand in greeting. Rinpoche didn't want to take it, but Geshe insisted, saying that his grandfather Tsarong had often helped him and his family, and it was the least he could do. He invited Rinpoche to come and visit anytime.

There was no one now to give Rinpoche orders, or make him go anywhere. He could do whatever he wanted to do. But what did he want to do? All his life there had been lamas, teachers, Communists or Gyenlog leaders telling him what he must do and where he must go. And now it was strange – even uncomfortable - not to be told what to do.

Now that he was in America, he reflected on the many years that he and other lamas and monks had been hated and treated with disgust and hostility by the Communists. Rinpoche had been able to avoid the worst of it, mainly because he had taken Gochok Rinpoche's warnings seriously and stayed in school. But still, he always had to pay attention to everything he said and did, to avoid more trouble from the Communists. Now he began to see those experiences in a new way – they actually had made him practice patience and compassion!

He stayed a few days with his sister Namlha and her husband, and then went to Galveston, Texas where his parents were living in an apartment. When he saw his mother for the first time, she thought he was way too thin and she was determined to help him gain weight. So she happily dragged him from one restaurant to another to eat a good meal.

In the winter of 1975, Rinpoche took a long trip with his mother on a Greyhound bus to visit his younger brother Paljor and his wife in Minneapolis, where Paljor was studying anthropology at University of Minnesota. While on the bus, Rinpoche's mind was absorbed in the different landscapes he saw out the window - many types of trees he had never seen before, and flat grassland and farmland that spread out in all directions with no mountains or hills. When the bus stopped on the way, everyone got out and went into a restaurant. The restaurant seemed lifeless. The people didn't smile – their faces were serious, grim; they barely glanced at anyone. The icy wind blowing in Minneapolis was even colder than the wind in Lhasa.



When Rinpoche met Paljor, they each tried to relate the young man in front of them with the brother they remembered from their childhood. As an anthropology student, Paljor had many questions about what Tibet was like now, and Rinpoche gave him detailed answers. (Photo: Paljor (left), Rinpoche (right), parents) His parents also hoped Rinpoche would tell them about his time in Tibet. Although they were very curious, they didn't push him to talk about it, as they had no idea what he might have gone through. Maybe they also feared they might hear things they would rather not

know about. Rinpoche didn't feel any urge to go into detail about his past right away. He wanted to explore and enjoy his freedom. His parents drove him many places to visit their Tibetan and American friends, and in the evening his father taught him some English. Rinpoche gradually began to tell his father about Tibet under Communist control. His father was outraged that, as he saw it, Tritsab Gyabra had treated him so badly, neglecting him. But Rinpoche never spoke with bitterness about the events in Tibet, and never blamed anyone. He kept a compassionate attitude in all that he talked about, whether about monastery officials, Tritsab Gyabra or the Communists rulers. He always took into account that they didn't understand everything, and they had their own fears and worries.

His parents had moved to Texas because his father met an American man called Norbu Chen who claimed to be a Tibetan lama, who had lots of energy, studied Tibetan Buddhism and was known as a great healer. Many people, including a billionaire and some celebrities, raved about his healing abilities. Rinpoche's father also believed Norbu Chen healed him, as he no longer had the terrible health problems that Indian, Swiss and American doctors were unable to cure.

During Paljor's summer vacation from college, he came to Texas, and taught Rinpoche how to drive a car. On Sundays, they cruised around the huge parking lots in front of shopping centers. Soon, Rinpoche was steering the car down side streets that had little traffic, and then on the busy highways. It was easy for Rinpoche to learn driving, but taking the written exam to get a driver's license was a problem because Rinpoche knew very little English. The first time he took the test, he failed it. Eventually he got his driver's license and he was free to drive on his own.

His parents pressured him to improve his English. His father, brother and sisters spoke excellent English, and his mother spoke it well also. Rinpoche signed up for an intensive English course at a language school at University of Texas. He took the bus to his English class early in the morning, but when his parents bought a new car, he drove his father's old Toyota to class.



After class was over, he had nothing to do in the afternoons. He didn't like to have nothing to do. He tried to get a job as a helper in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant near his parents' apartment, but the owners didn't seem to want to hire him. So Paljor helped him apply at a McDonald's restaurant in the neighborhood. Even though his English wasn't very good, the manager hired him right away. The job actually was better than a job at the Chinese restaurant because he could learn English at McDonald's, whereas he only would have spoken Chinese at the Chinese restaurant. He worked at McDonald's every afternoon.

It was a popular restaurant, so he had to work quickly without a moment to relax. During his first week, he had a hard time keeping all the orders straight, working and filling the machines and finishing the hamburgers quickly enough. Fortunately, the staff was patient with him, and soon he mastered the routine and could perform all the tasks smoothly.



He loved his work at McDonald's! What a difference between the simple hearth stove he had made out of bricks when he was working at the farm commune in Tibet, and the McDonald's kitchen with all the different sophisticated machines!

There was often something new in the McDonald's kitchen - things were replaced by something even better. Each week, something was changed or improved: the chairs were replaced, or the decorations were changed. Here you could obviously see the Buddhist teaching of impermanence, that everything changes! And there was constant activity and efficiency at McDonald's. Everything was coordinated

and well organized so there was no waste of time. He had never seen anything like it either in Tibet or in India. He began to think that people in the West - in the United States - were not only rich, but also their minds were advanced intellectually. He was most impressed by the way work was more specialized in the West - each person was a specialist at his specific job, and the jobs were coordinated so the people could work easily as a team.

QUESTIONS:

1. After seeing some of his family in India, where did Chetsang Rinpoche want to travel? (to the United States)
2. Did the officials in India who were processing Rinpoche's paper have good work habits? (no)
3. How Rinpoche feel at first when he had having nothing to do, and no one to tell him what to do? (strange, uncomfortable)
4. How did he like working at McDonalds? (he loved it)
5. What reminded him of impermanence at McDonald's? (everything was always changing)

DHARMA DISCUSSION – Patience:

After Rinpoche escaped to India, he patiently answered questions in interviews and waited for his papers so he could travel to see his family in the United States.

Gelek Rinpoche wanted to help Chetsang Rinpoche get his certificate as soon as possible, so he urged the officials to move the papers through the process. He was assertive - calling them, asking questions, and pressuring them- but he didn't get angry with them.

He remained patient and polite.



Chetsang Rinpoche's parents were patient with him, not pushing him to tell them everything about his experiences in Tibet, although they were probably very curious.

The McDonald's employees and customers were patient with Rinpoche, who didn't understand much English and was having difficulty keeping the orders straight.

This is the type of patience that we usually think about - not to be angry, whine, shout or insult others when you have to wait.

Are you patient when you have to wait, for example when waiting in a long line, when waiting for someone to give you something, or when someone gives you the wrong thing?

If you are sometimes impatient, try to be patient by remembering that someone like Rinpoche working at McDonald's might be just learning, so he is slow or not perfect yet.

Or someone could be having a tough day, and your impatience may be upsetting them.

Rather than upsetting others, try to calm everyone (including yourself) by silently chanting "Om Mani Padme Hum" while wishing they be happy and peaceful.

There is another type of patience: not to be angry, hostile or overly critical when someone does something you don't like.

Rinpoche was an example also of this second type of patience:

He wasn't bitter or angry and didn't blame others when he was neglected or disrespected, and not even when he was treated with hatred and hostility.

How could he be so patient when people treated him so badly?

By his compassion. He kept a compassionate attitude toward all people, even the Communist rulers and Red Guards.

He thought, they don't really understand what they're doing - they hadn't learned Dharma, and they had their own delusions, fears and worries.

What happens when a brother, sister, or classmate does something you don't like?

Do you immediately shout with an angry tone of voice? For example,

"No, you're doing it wrong!" "Give it back! It's mine!" "Don't put it there!"

"You're always bothering me!"

The Buddha taught us to "tame our own mind." He didn't tell us to tame someone else's mind!

So, when a kid does something you don't like but it's not really harming anyone,

remember to control your own mind; don't try to control someone else's mind.

You're not their parents!

There's no need to shout.

You can use a kinder tone of voice, you can nicely show them how to do something correctly.

You can remember, like Rinpoche, that others may not understand that what they were doing was wrong.

They don't want to be harshly criticized or insulted, just like you don't like it.

So, to be more patient, remember to have compassion.

If a brother, sister or classmate seems annoying and has no patience with you, be a good example and practice having more compassion for them.

In some situations, you can silently tell yourself one of these reminders:

"I can choose not to be upset. I can just walk away."

"If I can't change their behavior, I can change the way I feel about it."

"I shouldn't upset others around me with my impatience."

"This is a patience test – let's see if I pass or fail."

The more you practice patience, it becomes a habit to remain peaceful in different circumstances. And it helps you avoid saying things that you later regret.